

[Fortune Telling]

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Place of origin Portland, Oreg. Date 1/11/39

Project worker William C. Haight

Project editor

Remarks

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Form A

Circumstances of Interview

Federal Writers' Project

Works Progress Administration

OREGON FOLKLORE STUDIES

Name of worker William C. Haight Date January 11, 1939

Address 1225 SW Alder, Portland, Oregon.

Subject Fortune Telling

Name and address of informant Miss Smith

Carlton Hotel, Portland, Oregon.

Date and time of interview January 9, 10, 1939. At hours of 11, 3, and 7.

Place of interview Orange Lantern Tea Room, and Carlton Hotel.

Name and address of person, if any, who put you in touch with informant

A personal friend.

Name and address of person, if any, accompanying you None.

Description of room, house, surroundings, etc.

The Orange Lantern Tea Room is on the third floor of the Central Building. The fortune teller's business is conducted in a small waiting room, partially partitioned off from the tea

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room by a waist-high board "fence". The top of this fence is the base for an iron railing that supports a gaily colored burlap curtain. The furnishings of the room are: two davenports, a table, two lamps, several chairs, two magazine racks, and a desk by a window where the fortunes are told. A friendly, informal atmosphere would best describe the "feel" of the room.

Form B

Personal History of Informant

Federal Writers' Project

Works Progress Administration

OREGON FOLKLORE STUDIES

Name of worker William C. Haight Date January 11, 1939.

Address 1225 SW Alder

Subject Fortune Telling

Name and address of informant Miss Smith, Carlton Hotel, Portland, Oregon.

Information obtained should supply the following facts:

1. Ancestry
2. Place and date of birth
3. Family
4. Places lived in, with dates

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5. Education, with dates

6. Occupations and accomplishments with dates

7. Special skills and interests

8. Community and religious activities

9. Description of informant

10. Other points gained in interview

1. English, French, and Cherokee Indian.

2. Place of birth: Ritter, Oregon. Date: Exercised a lady's prerogative and decided not to tell.

3. Family: Pioneers of Eastern Oregon country. Her grandmother came to Oregon by ox team, taking two years to cross the continent. En route she bore two children, one of these children being the mother of the informant. Her mother was born in Little Rock, Arkansas. Reaching Oregon the family settled in a fort in the John Day Valley. Part of her family fought in the Indian Wars, but she was unable to tell on which side they fought. Later the family moved to Long Creek, Oregon. Her grandmother still lives in the log cabin that she first moved into. At a recent reunion the grandmother counted up and found that she had 30 grandchildren, and 17 great-grandchildren, all living. 2 4. Places lived in: Long Creek, Ritter, Pendleton. These dates are hazy in her mind and she said they would be unreliable, so she refused to give them. Other places she had lived in were: Los Angeles, California, Eugene and Portland, Oregon.

5. She is a graduate of St. Joseph's Academy, of Pendleton, Oregon. Attended the University of Oregon for two years.

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6. Occupations: For a short while she sold toys for the Meier & Frank Company, of Portland. Since then she has been telling fortunes exclusively. No accomplishments.

7. Special skills and interests: By eliminating two more players she will be the champion pinochle player of Oregon. Rarely does she miss an evening playing cards. Her hobby is collecting elephants. These elephants must have their trunks raised and pointed towards the east.

8. Religion: Belongs to the Unity Church.

9. Description: The informant is five feet one inch tall, weight—much too much. Her features are evenly formed. She would be a beautiful woman if she were slimmer. Her dark brown eyes are accented by pleasingly long eyelashes. During the day her dark brown hair is covered by a gingham handkerchief; long braids hang down over her shoulder. In the evening her hair is attractively marcelled, with a medium long bob. The braids are obviously pinned on for the day's work. Her costume during working hours is a gaily-colored gingham dress that reaches nearly to the floor. Her feet are covered with beaded moccasins. Many bracelets, usually of silver color, cover her arms. The evening manner of dress is in accordance with the modes of the day.

10. The informant is fairly certain that she has been given a great gift. The gift is enhanced by an orderly process of thinking, "right thinking", and an unusually 3 retentive memory. Miss Smith's ability to read minds has never amazed her. She is grateful that she can use this gift for the betterment of mankind. She has no personal problems.

Form C

Text of Interview (Unedited)

Federal Writers' Project

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Works Progress Administration

OREGON FOLKLORE STUDIES

Name of worker William C. Haight Date January 10, 1939.

Address 1225 SW Alder

Subject Fortune Telling

Name and address of informant Miss Smith, Carlton Hotel

Text:

I started telling fortunes when I was just a youngster at the convent in Pendleton, Oregon. The Sisters did not approve or believe in fortune telling, but on Hallowe'en they would dress me as a witch and let me tell all the girls fortunes.

It was really kind of a lark that sent me into the fortune telling business. My mother and I came to Portland for a vacation from Eastern Oregon. I decided, after talking to some friends, to stay here and see if I could get a job.

While talking to a friend in a restaurant a man said to my friend, he was looking for people to help him put on a carnival here in Portland, for the Moose Lodge. My girl friend told him that perhaps he could use me as a fortune teller.

This fellow asked me if I would like to work for a week as his assistant in fortune telling. It had never occurred to me to make my living in that manner until then. More for the fun of it than anything else I decided to try it.

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The job required considerable knowledge and training. The men used what we call the "code" system. By this I mean the man would go out in the audience and touch an article. His assistant blindfolded, sitting on the stage would call out what he had touched. This is accomplished by a system of syllable or word signals. My answer depended on what he said. It always amazed audiences, but there really wasn't much to it. All you need is a nimble mind.

Rather an amusing incident occurred there while I was working. I had not told my mother that I was working. When it came time for me to leave the hotel to go to work I would tell her that I had a date. One evening, my mother and a sister of hers decided to take in the carnival. While they were walking around, the fellow who called the signals touched my mother's purse and asked me what it was. Of course, I didn't know who it was, but when my mother heard my voice she said, "Why, that's my daughter!" The man was more or less astonished, but did not say anything. My costume, an Egyptian one, covered my entire body, a heavy veil covered my face, and my eyes were blindfolded. It had never occurred to me that my mother would possibly recognize me from my voice.

Mother let me get away with what I was doing for three nights, then she finally told me she knew what I was up to. She told me then that I could continue during this one week and have my fun. After that I had to come home with her.

This did not fit in with my plans at all. When the carnival was over I obtained a job in Meier & Frank's, and decided to stay here in Portland. I spent most of my time at Meier & Frank's telling the employees' fortunes, instead of selling toys. Too, I used to slip out of my department and go over in the book department and read a book called "One Thousand and One Dreams." Oddly enough, that same book is still there.

After leaving Meier & Frank's I have been telling fortunes ever since.

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When I first started here in Portland the Spiritualists filed a protest and had a warrant sworn out against me. I was taken down to the Police Station. It seemed they had invoked a law that had been passed during the Lewis and Clark fair to keep the Gypsies out of Portland. At the Police Station they told me I had to get a petition signed by at least ten taxpayers, of my respectability and character. Then, they might possibly grant me a license. It was an easy thing for me to do. I haven't been bothered since with the police, although they periodically round up all fortune tellers. I am listed as a Psychic Psychologist.

What I really do is read people's minds. I can tell a person's problems the minute I see them. I use cards in my business so I can direct the thoughts and attentions of the clients. Usually the problem that is bothering them, they will make a wish concerning that problem. I can read their minds and help them solve their problems.

I solve many, many problems for my clients. I have in my clientele people brought to me when they were children. I have told their fortunes through childhood, high school, college, and am now telling their children's fortunes. Interesting isn't it?

My gift is, I suppose, a gift from God. All is mental. All problems can be worked out by right thinking. The vibrations from people tell me all I need to know about them.

Astrology is a part of the trade. Quite often I use the astrological charts in chartering a course for people to follow.

(She interrupted her train of thought here and asked me when I was born. In January, I told her. She said, "You must have friends born in September. I get strong and good vibrations from them.")

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I have had many interesting clients, ranging from the crazy neurotic type to hard headed business men. I will tell you about two or three cases she said.

One night I was sitting in my hotel room reading, when the telephone rang. I answered it and a lady said that she had just got in on the bus from Idaho. She had traveled all that distance just to have me tell her fortune. I told her to come on up, and I would see what I could do for her.

Well, she came up, and I gave her an ordinary reading. There didn't seem to be anything unusual about her life that needed such an urgent reading. Quite grateful for the reading, she thanked me profusely. I went to bed still puzzled by the whole thing, but decided she was just a nut.

I hadn't been in bed very long though, when the phone rang again. This woman said to me, "OH! I forgot to ask you the most important question of all. Could you tell me who killed my husband thirty years ago in Baker, Oregon?"

For a minute she had me stumped. Then I told her that it was against the law for a fortune teller to tell such information. Which is true. Also I told her that since he had been dead for thirty years she had better forget about it, and put her mind on more constructive thinking. That even if she did find out it wouldn't do her much good.

Whether she followed my advice or not, I don't know. I never heard from her again.

Another night some fool woman awakened me and asked me if I could tell her whether the signs were right for her bulldog to have an appendicitis operation. I told her I would have to look it up and would call her back. I never called her. Some people are crazy.

Usually the most interesting cases turn up in the middle of the night. People seem to be more distracted at that time than any other.

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One customer [th / at?] I saved from suicide. She called me up one morning about two o'clock and she said she had found out that her husband - who by the way was a traveling salesman - was stepping out on her. She had decided to kill herself. First, however, she wanted her fortune read.

Well, I'll tell you, I dressed and grabbed a taxi and went to her place as fast as I could. I told that lady's fortune and convinced her that her husband was not stepping out on her.

The lady believed me, and she is happily married to the same man. That happened over 12 years ago. People are funny.

Form D

Extra Comment

Federal Writers' Project

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OREGON FOLKLORE STUDIES

Name of worker William C. Haight, Date January 10, 1939.

Address 1225 SW Alder St. Portland.

Subject Fortune Telling.

Name and address of informant

Miss Smith, Carlton Hotel, Portland.

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Comment: For about an hour I watched customers that came to her at the Tea Room. That evening from 7:30 until 10 I watched an entirely different group of customers, that came up to her hotel room to have their fortunes told.

Many of the people in the tea room seemed to lack material possessions. All of them looked distressed, were nervous, and seemed to leave her with their minds relieved. This of course, is conjecture, but they at least looked happier.

They were of all ages, from the very young to the very old. One woman that came in told me that she expected the fortune teller to tell her where her lost brother was. I was unable to find out if she found where the wandering brother was. Most of the people at the tea room are looking for employment and they feel that the fortune teller can tell them where they will find it.

At the hotel she deals with an entirely different group of people. Well dressed, business people, in the upper brackets, would be my guess. They seem to come in pairs. She later told me that most of her evening trade was from husbands and wives. They solve their marital problems by the stars and fortune telling.

Miss Smith strikes me as being a highly intelligent woman. Unusually sensitive to peoples' reactions, and a student of psychology. Her long association with people in distress has undoubtedly developed in her a keen inception into 2 human nature. I presume people by their nervous mannerisms, and in the casual course of conversation, lead the fortune teller into making most of her decisions. She says that she doesn't hear voices, she just gets their thoughts. They sort of drift into her mind.

A highly practical woman, she would probably make a good personnel manager, mainly from her ability to help people and see through them.

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Her clientele are mostly old customers - people who have been coming to her for years. She solves practically all their problems.

She has what she calls a Prosperity Bank. This bank catches all the extra change she has, and every time she reads the fortune of a drunk she charges him ten cents for her Prosperity Bank. The money in this bank is used to defray the cost of purchasing, usually for persons who are depressed and worried, a year's subscription to the Daily Word. This is a magazine that is used in connection with the Unity Church. This church is a mental science school of thought.

Miss Smith's fortune telling seems to be more of an analysis of people's problems, than of offering them common-sense methods of solving them. I believe that she is influenced by her religion in solving these problems.

About the only superstition other than fortune telling, that she subscribes to is the hobby of collecting elephants. The elephants must have their trunks raised and pointed towards the east, otherwise they would bring bad luck. These elephants sit on a radiator in her room. She recently secured a compass and she found out that they were not facing the east, but were a little off. Since she couldn't move the hotel she moved the elephants.

Her early life was spent in the back country of Eastern Oregon. The people in that section are noted for peculiar concepts of life. note/ 3 Their amusements, when she was a child, were dancing, swimming, fighting, getting drunk, making moonshine, and lovin'.

Her mother operates a hot springs that presumably cures everything. They have a moss that grows in the bottom of their hot water pool that cures ulcers. This moss is a gray-black color under the water. As soon as it is removed from the water this moss turns a brilliant bright green. Presumably the minerals in the moss cure the ulcers.